1: Radcliffe-Brown E-5 (1906-1908)1922
AZ2 Andamans AZ2

question the natives about their customs and beliefs and understand their answers. I was therefore regretfully compelled to give up the idea of making a study of the people of the Little Andaman, and devoted the remainder of my time to the study of the tribes of the Great Andaman, particularly those of the North Andaman among whom Mr Man had not worked. I kept one boy from the Little Andaman with me for some months in the hope that he would learn sufficient Hindustani to act as an interpreter and so enable any future investigator to begin work with the great advantage that I had lacked.

In my work amongst the natives of the Great Andaman I at first made use of Hindustani, which the younger men and women all speak more or less imperfectly, and gradually acquired a knowledge of the dialects of the North Andaman. Towards the end of my stay in the islands I was able to obtain the services as interpreter of a man of the *Akar-Bale* tribe who spoke English well and was of considerable intelligence. He is shown in the photographs of Plates V and XIII. With his help I was able to do some work with the *Akar-Bale* and *A-Pučikwar* tribes, and I found that with such an interpreter I was able to obtain much fuller and more reliable results than I could by using my own knowledge of the native language supplemented by Hindustani. If I had had his services from the outset my work would have been much easier and more thorough.

The results of my researches on the physical anthropology of the Andaman Islanders have not been published. I hoped to be able to obtain the services of some one more competent in such matters than myself to assist or direct me in the measurement and study of the collection of skulls and skeletons that I brought to England and that is now in the Anthropological Museum at Cambridge. In this I was disappointed, and absence from England has prevented me from completing my work in this branch of research.

The languages of the Andaman Islands are chiefly of interest as affording material for the study of comparative grammar and

Mr Subramanian of the Forest Department and Mr Majid's young son also accompanied us. We reached Bumila Creek on the north eastern coast of the Little Andaman at about 3 P.M. and having sighted an Andamanese hut we decided to anchor the launch there. The beach was about 2 miles from the place of anchorage. We took out a small boat and rowed to the beach and reached the hut at about 4 P.M. It was found to be abandoned but there were signs of human occupation and within a few yards a water-hole was discovered. A broken canoe, with a single out-rigger was found close to the hut (*see* Plate I, Fig. 1). Burnt coal and smouldering ashes in the centre of the hut showed that it was probably deserted by the Aborigines as soon as they had sighted us. After making a careful inspection of the place we returned to our launch and decided to anchor there for the night. Unfortunately the choppy sea and the strong current coming from the Bumila Creek tossed our small boat throughout the whole night, as a result of which all of us had an uncomfortable time.

We left southwards towards Hut Bay early in the morning and as we moved along the coast we sighted another Onge hut. This did not seem to be deserted as we saw a few people moving about. We decided to stop there and investigate. We took out a boat and moved towards the coast with such presents as we had brought from Port Blair on the advice of the Chief Commissioner. When we got near the coast, we left the boat and walked for about a furlong through coral beds finally reaching the shore. The hut was found to be circular in shape and not too large, and was occupied by 2 adult females, 1 adult male and a young boy. The adult male, *Ukla*, was the father of the young boy and husband of the younger woman. The older woman was his mother-in-law. These people appeared very friendly. We gave them presents we had brought and took photographs and made drawings of their hut. In addition, full anthropometric measurements were taken by me and blood was taken from fingers for typing by Mr Sarkar. Ukla was able to speak a few Hindi words and we gathered that he had been to Port Blair and knew Mr Bonington, formerly of the Forest Department, Andaman Islands. We found in front of the hut, hanging from a large tree the skull and mandible of a Dugong (*see* Plate I, Figs. 3 & 4). We enquired about its significance from Ukla, but unfortunately his knowledge of Hindi was not sufficient to explain it to us. We learned from him, however, that the name of the village was *Laito*. After making friendly gestures, we returned to 'Molly' and proceeded immediately towards Hut Bay. At about noon time while we were having our lunch, we suddenly saw three outrigger canoes (of single outrigger type) coming towards us, each carrying about 4 Onges. We signalled to them and they came to our launch and tied their canoes with it and came on board. The men appeared to be friendly and not afraid of us. Our greatest difficulty, however, was language, as we could not make ourselves understood as none of the crew or any other member including Mr Subramaniam of the Forest Department knew that language. There was one man who seemed to occupy a position of authority among these men, and was painted with red and yellow ochre on the forehead, arms and breast. The

6: Cipriani E-5 (1951-1953)1961 AZ2 Andamans AZ2
Onge

122 torches for hunting by night. There were pigs everywhere. In half an hour we often got
114 six or more of them. At Chemalê, far from the coast, we had eleven in a few minutes for
[136] distribution to everybody, including roaming Onge. Pigeons and ducks also were often plentiful. The simple pleasures of hunting incited everyone to a spontaneous daily struggle through the dense forest ; and so, every month, I managed to carry out many times the work I could have done had I not kept all the men glad to follow me. On seven different occasions I spent 162 days in Little Andaman, out of a total of 634 days altogether in the Andamanese Archipelago – all of them given up to Onge research. These trips are recorded
128 in Port Blair Government offices. A few details on the subject are published in the "Bul-
114 letin of the Department of Anthropology", Government of India, starting in Vol. II, No. 1, 1953 (issued in 1956) and extended to other issues. Such papers were hurriedly prepared by me while I was halting in Calcutta on my way from the Andamans to Europe. Press proofs could never be submitted to me; there are, consequently, many misprints, particularly in the figures relating to my Onge Census. The misprints are so obvious that they could only influence a most biased critic : to be discussed in future papers and while my Onge book is in preparation. In Port Blair (South Andaman) I started an Onge Museum with material collected by me. I had the honour of inaugurating it on 6 July, 1953 in the presence of the Chief Commissioner for Andamans and Nicobars, Mr. A. K. Ghosh, one of the kindest and most intelligent Indian gentlemen that it was my pleasure to meet in Asia. On 9 March, 1954 Dr. RAJENDRA PRASAD, President of the Republic of India, also visited the Museum. On that occasion I introduced to him 30 of my Onge friends (wives, husbands and children) in their most natural attire. The President questioned me at length on Onge anthropology and ethnology with the pertinence of a specialist.

123 While in Little Andaman I tried to study all possible aspects of Onge life. I also
[121] tried to count the natives : a very difficult task for they are a nomadic people, ready to vanish into the jungle at any moment. Often I was surrounded by them without seeing a single one. In the darkness of their jungle, be small, black, naked Onge easily disappear. They see us but we do not see them. They can only be counted in their sleeping quarters
[361] in communal huts ; even so, results are misleading. I found a number of communal huts
[126] in the interior regions of Little Andaman, whereas previously they were said to exist
[178] only on the coast. The larger, more solidly built huts are in the forest. With the help
361 of my Indian assistants I obtained plans and photographs of all the huts that I saw.
[24] Unfortunately the number of Onge communal huts is rapidly diminishing – a very significant fact. Many are in ruins, many more completely destroyed. Only kitchen-middens and occasional clusters of planted bamboo indicate their former location. Through an interpreter, and with two Onge speaking a little Hindi, I was able to gather information on these and other matters. Direct observation, however, proved the best way of gaining knowledge. In some places there was nothing to help me, and I was compelled to guess
[551] about communal huts whose inmates chose to hide in the jungle. Of the many personal
[553] names that I collected I must say that they are reliable only for a short period : the Onge
[547] like to change their names from time to time. All this, in addition to the Onge's nomadic way of life, causes great confusion and makes a proper Census almost impossible. Frequent changing of names also hinders the establishment of genealogies. Furthermore, the Onge custom of adopting children shifts many of them from one family to another, and adoptive *parents invariably claim them* as their own offspring. The parents themselves, who are ignorant of numbers, not infrequently forget how many children they have, who these children are and where they are located. It was almost useless to follow previous information concerning communal huts ; and so I decided to consider mainly the situation
[114] existing at the time of my visits. The result of my Census may be imperfect, but before criticizing it it would be advisable to know the conditions that prevail in anthropological work among the Onge. Something more than merely counting people, anyhow, was achieved by me in Little Andaman.

In this short paper I am pleased to present a peculiar aspect of Onge life, an aspect that these innocent and once hostile people did not attempt to hide from me, though they also told me nothing about it. Only direct observation could help, and it involved pro-

114 Brief reconnaissance tours among the Ongi were made by Indian anthropologists in 1948 (Dr. B. S. GUHA and assistants), 1949 (Dr. A. K. MITRA and assistants) and 1955 (Dr. N. DATTA-MAJUMDER). Professor LIDIO CIPRIANI is the only scholar who engaged in prolonged research among the Ongi of Little Andaman, and this not only on the coast, but also in the interior of the island. In March, 1952, he crossed the island from the East to the West Coast. He was again among the Ongi from February to May, 1953, and from February to May, 1954. A brief report on his 1952 and 1953 expeditions was published in the Bulletin of the Department of Anthropology, Calcutta. He is planning to publish his results in a book. In 1953 and 1954, he was accompanied by a young Bengali, Mr. PRONAB GANGULI, who collected about 400 Ongi words.

[124] When all of Professor CIPRIANI's results are published we shall, no doubt, be well informed about the Ongi's physical anthropology, their material culture and such aspects of their customs as can be observed without a knowledge of their language and without an adequate interpreter. However, as he himself remarks in the letter mentioned above, "the barrier of language makes it difficult to analyze many Ongi facts". Therefore we cannot expect a deeper insight into the Ongi's social organization, religion, myths and customs.

[161] To sum up: We are confronted here with a group that is in danger of disappearing in the not very distant future. It may survive [182] for several decades in ever diminishing numbers, but its extermination may at any time be accelerated by epidemics. Moreover, its culture is already beginning to undergo substantial changes and may disintegrate very fast. If ever there was a case for urgent research, it is that of the Ongi. When, in the Census Report of 1931, BONINGTON observed with regard to them that here "a vast field of research awaits the anthropologist of the future", the Director General of the Census, J. H. HUTTON, significantly added in a footnote: "Provided, that is, that the Onge survives long enough".

The task is not only urgent, but unusually promising. An ambitious and well trained anthropologist who decides to spend the necessary time among the Ongi of Little Andaman will find an almost virgin field of research and one of the most archaic cultures still extant, a culture which, though already threatened, is at present still essentially intact. He can be sure that his researches, if properly done, will yield results of the first importance which, when published, may rank with EDWARD HORACE MAN's and RADCLIFFE-BROWN's classic works on the great Andaman tribes.

[124] Dr. CIPRIANI's experiences show that a prolonged sojourn on Little Andaman is perfectly feasible. The greatest obstacle to

fieldwork among the Ongi is the language problem. Dr. DATTA-MAJUMDER writes: 114 124

"It should be noted that very little information about the social organization of the Onge has been gathered so far on account of the barrier of language. Not a single interpreter knowing Onge language is available. We came across only two Onge men who knew just a few words of Hindi as a result of their occasional visits to Port Blair".

This was confirmed by Professor CIPRIANI who, in his letter, also mentions the two Ongi who know a little Hindi and adds: "No real Ongi interpreter is, as yet, available". RADCLIFFE-BROWN's experience had been similar. He found only two Ongi men who knew about 20 words of Hindustani.

PORTMAN seems to have been more fortunate in 1886—87. He mentions having had Ongi interpreters. These may have been members of a group of eleven persons who had been captured in the Cinque Islands, between Great and Little Andaman, in 1885 and who had been brought to Port Blair. It would be of great help for anthropological research if a few Ongi could be induced to stay some time in Port Blair and to learn either Hindi or English. In any case, however, an anthropologist wishing to do serious work on Little Andaman will have to remain long enough on the island to acquire sufficient knowledge of the language. He could prepare himself in advance for this task through a thorough study of the available literature on the Great Andaman languages (MAN, PORTMAN, TEMPLE, BASU). Although the languages are different, they are related, and their structure is probably more or less similar. For the Ongi language itself, we have only RADCLIFFE-BROWN's "Notes on the Languages of the Andaman Islands", the list of Ongi words in PORTMAN's "Manual of the Andamanese Languages" (1887) — which RADCLIFFE-BROWN found "of no service whatever" — and a vocabulary of the Ongi language, compiled by M. C. C. BONIG in 1903 and published in Port Blair. 119 122 197

M. C. C. BONIG, (Vocabulary of the Onge Language, exact title not available), Port Blair, 1903. 113

Census of India, 1901, Vol. III, *The Andaman and Nicobar Islands*, by R. C. TEMPLE, pp. 91—95 (PORTMAN's report), 117—120 (language).

Census of India, 1911, Vol. II, *The Andaman and Nicobar Islands*, by R. F. LOWIS, pp. 6, 27—29, 81—82, 88.

Census of India, 1931, Vol. II, *The Andaman and Nicobar Islands*, by R. F. LOWIS, pp. 2—5, 14—15.

Census of India, 1931, Vol. II, *The Andaman and Nicobar Islands*, by M. C. C. BONINGTON, pp. 8—11, 16—19, 22.

10: Sen K-3, 4 (ca. 1955) 1962 AZ2 Andamans AZ2
Onge

rather than order is given by the leader. Cipriani observes.[1] "For instance, it is very amusing for them to think that a man gives orders to others. This means that they have no real chiefs. A so-called Onge chief, or raja, is only the head of a group of families living in the same communal hut, and giving not orders but only advice. It is the most experienced man who is considered chief in the hut, but his authority if at all never goes beyond that hut. In other words no real chief exists in the Little Andaman. Notwithstanding this, there is a perfect order in the island, because nobody interferes with the work or encroches upon what can be considered the rights of others."

As is common to most of the aborigines, the Onges are generally not very receptive when the questions about their numbers and other groups are enquired. The headman says that there are many many fifty Onges. However the number of the Onges are approximately 600.

As regards the mode of living of the Onges, the hunting and collecting are the basis of their economy. The domestication of the plants i.e. art of agriculture is not known to them and it is only 30 years back, the dogs arrived in the island and have been domesticated by the Onges for chasing the pigs, their main prey. In the absence of agriculture, the natural products of the sea and the forest provide them with all their items of diet. Animal and vegetable products and honey are the main items of their diet and there has been, so far, no introduction of salt in their diet. The most important victims of their hunting are pigs and turtles, the former is chased by dogs and are killed with great cruelty. The cooking of the fish, meat, roots, tubers, jackfruits etc are done by putting them under fire. Preservation of foodstuffs is not widely practised except the jackfruit seeds which are tied up in a small net inside water on the bank of some stream and taken out during rainy season, when the other vegetable foodstuffs are not available. On the whole, the Onges have a very balanced diet with a fair richness of all the nutrients. In this connection the observations of Dr. Cipriani during his survey in the Little Andaman throws considerable light in their conditions of life. He has estimated the Onges as one of the happiest people of the world, who in spite of their primitive economy, are not the miserable victims of poor health, ill nutrition and oddities of life.

Some amount of artistry and craftsmanship have developed among these people. A canoe can be constructed by a man, all by himself from

1 Cipriani, L—Survey of Little Andaman during 1954; Bul. Dept. Anth.,

11: Cipriani E-3 (1951-1955) 1966 AZ2 Andamans AZ2
Jarawas
Onges

This was a pity, as I knew that my Indian and Burmese companions were ready to run any risk with the prudence they had already shown in Little Andaman towards the Onges. Since North Sentinel is flat and its forest not impassable, a peace mission led by men accustomed to dealing with people like the Andamanese, though it would certainly need more than a brief stay, would probably be ultimately successful.

My sole source of local information on the Jarawas was the wife of a government official, who had tended a pregnant woman and four children who were captured during one of the punitive expeditions on Bluff Island. She gave me a great deal of useful information, and indeed the greater part of our scanty ethnographical and linguistic data on the Jarawas has been obtained through her.

Until 1932 the attitude of the various groups of Onges was very similar. Along the coast, however, they had already had some contact many years ago with a limited number of outsiders. Compared with the Jarawas they have been uniquely fortunate among surviving primitive peoples in that their extremely fertile territory has remained immune from invasion. In this they have been helped by their geographical isolation as much as by their own ferocity. Indeed Little Andaman, surrounded by an ocean that frequently turns into the proverbial boiling cauldron, presents grave risks to anyone trying to land. I had considerable experience of this myself; on many occasions I nearly gave up when the boat was overturned by giant breakers. On one occasion on the south coast of the island we were flung into the sea, and the empty boat capsized and dragged me down. No one was in a position to come to my rescue, but the momentary relief of an enormous return wave enabled me to extricate myself. The previous day the breakers had crashed down one after another and smashed us against the coral reef which runs right round Little Andaman. Our baggage and provisions had disappeared, and until help arrived we were forced to remain for two gruelling days without water or food, with no protection from the sun and in constant danger of being attacked by the Onges.

During the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries

11: Cipriani E-3 (1951-1955) 1966 AZ2 Andamans AZ2

842 163 enjoy the active marital relationships necessary, according to their husbands, to encourage the entry of the benevolent spirits which bring motherhood. The late onset of fertility in all Andamanese 842 163 165 women and perhaps in men as well[1] probably depends on mechanisms which have been operating for a very long time, affecting the sex ratio at birth, and preferential infant mortality in one sex. [123] By a combination of observation and deduction I was able to be [124] reasonably certain that among the Onges at least more males are born than females. The disparity is reduced, though not eliminated, by a higher mortality rate in young males. Males thus remain in excess, making it difficult for some, possibly fertile, to find wives.

842 143 161 There are certain peoples – notably the Pitcairn Islanders – who have arisen by repeated inbreeding for hundreds of years from a very few individuals. It is clear from this example that genetic isolation and inbreeding cannot of themselves cause numerical, physical or mental decline of a population. The problem merits further investigation. Civilization has perhaps accused herself unjustly of causing the decline of primitive races, whereas she has in fact only hastened the disappearance of groups already heading for demographic decadence as the result of physiological factors which lie within the group itself, and which are consequently difficult to counteract. The intrinsic damage done by civilization as such has, in my opinion, been considerably exaggerated in some quarters.

855 597 Possibly because of the low birth rate the maternal instinct is very highly developed in the women of the Andamans, even to the point of 'adopting' children temporarily. These children are always given lavish affection, and are kept sometimes for years, or even permanently if the parents do not ask for them back. Given the language barrier, this custom makes census-taking difficult as childless couples happily declare adopted children as their own. Nabimbòi, with no children of her own, always had children with her, and it was only the fact that they differed from year to year that led me to suspect what was happening! One wonders whether the custom was not already common before outsiders first came to the Andamans, owing to the existence of a high incidence of sterility long before the arrival of civilization.

[1] There is some evidence of infertility in the men, but it is clear that this is of relatively minor importance.